

# Heaven is not so far away

All Souls Day for me is always mainly about my nephew Georgie. Georgie was just a few weeks away from his due date **when his heart stopped beating** in utero. That was five years ago this fall.

It was Halloween. I was getting ready to drive my children to show their grandmother their costumes before a night of trick-or-treating when my father called to break the news.

I remember having to tell my 5-year-old, who was sitting happily in the back seat in his Darth Vader costume. I answered every question I could. But I didn't know what to do with the hard one: "Why?"

"I don't know," I finally said. "I just don't know."

Five years later, I still do not know, but I no longer ask why. We miss Georgie, of course, and we love him as an important member of our family. We decorate his grave and talk to him. We remember him in our prayers. We ask him to intercede for us. When our children list their cousins, Georgie is always included. We never met him on earth, but he's as loved and as much a part of our family as if he were here.

Five years ago as I prayed during Mass on All Souls Day with tears streaming down my face, I was unable to see the light of the resurrection. I believed Georgie was in heaven, but I was too deep in grief for my sister and her husband to see how much joy this little one could continue to bring to our family.

But he has. Our relationship with Georgie is the most extraordinary gift. For me, as a mother, he inspires me to view the little victories in our children's lives as their own miracles. Thinking of him and his brief but well-lived life helps me keep the challenges we face in perspective. When I am praying for impossible intentions, Georgie is my go-to intercessor – and I feel so comforted knowing I have his ear. I imagine him sitting on Jesus' lap asking for help for his family on earth.

As much as I thought I valued life before knowing Georgie, he has truly transformed my perspective. When a friend or family member announces a pregnancy, I never

ever take that new precious little life for granted. Every baby is such an amazing gift – and with a profound impact.

Often I think of other little souls such as Georgie, who never had a chance to experience life on this earth, but who make a lasting difference. If those little saints can touch lives as deeply as they have, how much might each of us be able to do every day we are given life on this earth?

All Souls Day isn't just about Georgie, of course. It's a day for all of us to remember all of our loved ones who died, and pray that they are in heaven. How wonderful, how beautiful, that we have a day to pause and think of all those who have gone before – and ask Jesus to bring them to heaven if they aren't already there. I love teaching our children about praying for those who have died and explaining that during the consecration we are all reunited around the table of the Lord.

As Catholic Christians, we know that we never really lose anyone we love. We might just be physically separated for a while.

Just a few weeks ago during Mass, my younger son tapped me on the shoulder.

"How old would Georgie be if he were alive?" he whispered.

"He would be about to turn 5," I said.

"Five!" he whispered. "I was really little when he died."

It's true. He was 3 at the time. I remember wondering whether he was grasping any of it. But he definitely understood – and he understands even more fully now.

Somehow knowing that your cousin is already there makes heaven seem not quite so far away.